Christ Was The Serpent In Genesis 1? Strange!

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Was Christ in Genesis 1? Most people have heard some version of the story with the serpent in the Garden of Eden described in Genesis 3, in which God commands Adam and Eve not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but the snake talks Eve (and, indirectly, Adam) into doing so. The story, as well as many other stories in Genesis, have inspired countless people throughout the ages– both those who take it literally and those who take it figuratively. For those who take it literally, however, there are some pretty challenging problems.

The depiction of God can be cruel (for example, turning Lot's wife into salt), genocidal (with the Flood), and even… perhaps factually wrong. It's this last one that helped inspire early Christian thinkers, like the author of the Testimony of Truth, to think differently about the story. In the Testimony of Truth, not only is the God depicted in the garden of Eden malicious, but the snake is not the devil– it's Christ!

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God Was… Not So Great?

The Testimony of Truth points out some really problematic behavior from God in Genesis 3. First off– God was either wrong, or lying. God commanded, "you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die", but did that occur? It seems like an empty threat– neither Adam or Eve actually died upon touching or eating the fruit!

Another thing the text points out is that God's motivations here seem really problematic. In Genesis 22, God says, "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever". God's motivation is that he doesn't *want* man to have eternal life, and to be like him! That's pretty concerning, right? Wasn't Christ's whole message that we should be like him and have eternal life?

The writer of the Testimony of Truth concluded that this being which Genesis calls "God" must not, in reality, be the true God– certainly not the god and father of Christ. His solution is to consider the god of Genesis (and, indeed, the Old Testament in general) to not really be the true God, but a demiurge, a lower deity. For background on the topic, I'd encourage you to read my article, The Demiurge, Intriguing Solution to Hard Old Testament Problems.

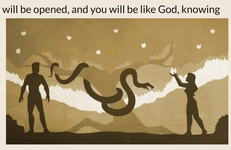
The Testimony of Truth certainly doesn't shy away from the asking what we should make of this deity, The text argues:

> What kind of a god is this?
> First, he begrudged Adam's eating from the tree of knowledge.
> Second, he said, "Adam, where are you?" God does not have foreknowledge; otherwise, wouldn't he have known from the beginning?
> He has certainly shown himself to be a malicious grudger. And what kind of a god is this?

This is *clearly* not a positive perspective on the god of the Old Testament!

If God Was A Demiurge… Who Was The Serpent?

According to The Testimony of Truth, it's not God who told the truth in Genesis 3; it's the serpent! Genesis 3 tells us that, "the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."



On surface level, this seems to be true. When Adam and Eve ate the fruit, they did not die. Their eyes were opened, causing them to realize that they were naked. Finally, they were ashamed, indicating that they knew good and evil.

To take it another level, though, the text points out that what the snake was advocating for… actually sounds pretty good, right? Christ didn't want us to die, right? Wasn't a consistent activity in his miracles that he was opening eyes, restoring sight to the blind? Finally, wouldn't God *want* us to know good from evil?

The Testimony of Truth points out that serpents show up in other places in Genesis. For example: In Exodus 7, Moses and Aaron must perform a miracle before Pharaoh. Aaron throws down his staff, which becomes a snake. Pharaoh's magicians do the same, but Aaron's serpent is more powerful and consumes the serpents of the Pharaoh.

A much more powerful and relevant example for the author of the Testimony of Truth, however, comes from Numbers 21, in which, after the Israelites have been bitten by poisonous serpents:

> And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

The Testimony of Truth proudly proclaims about this:

> For this is Christ; [those who have] believed in him have [received life]. Those who did not believe [will die].

Indeed, the story found in Number 21 shows a metaphor that seems profoundly similar to the story of Christ's crucifixion. Those who look to the crucified serpent survive, while those without the eyes to see perish. It's a gripping image, isn't it?

The Testimony of Truth argues that it's revealing Christ as the serpent found in the story of Genesis. The image of the serpent is *not* diabolical, but rather the one of the power and truth of God. It consumes the false magic of Pharaoh's magicians, and it brings salvation and life to those who are condemned but look upon it.

Concluding Thoughts

I find it an interesting puzzle. I do think it can be problematic to take a text like this literally– but, even if we take it figuratively, we're still stuck with selecting what messages to take away. I certainly don't see God as being described in many of the Genesis texts as being the kind of God that Christ seems to have worshiped and identified as his father.

On the other hand, I want to be very careful about throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Taking too hard of a demiurgical approach can verge on anti-Semitic, depending on how you approach it. Jewish thinkers have been pondering these problems for centuries– longer than Christians have, certainly– and have found other ways to approach the problem.

The demiurgical strategy is interesting, and I think there's value there for a modern context. I also think one needs to be very careful and intentional about how one presents the narrative, and one must take responsibility for the implications of that narrative and the effect it has on others.

What do you think? Are the arguments found in The Testimony of Truth persuasive? Do you think that the god described in Genesis makes sense as the true God, the father of Christ? Do you think it makes sense to see Christ as the serpent in the story? Do you see value in the demiurgical approach to the story?

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